

“Believing is Seeing”

Psalm 133

¹How good and how pleasant it is,
when kindred live together in unity!

²It is like fine oil upon the head, flowing down upon the beard,
upon the beard of Aaron, flowing down upon the collar of his robe.

³It is like the dew of Hermon flowing down upon the hills of Zion.
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing: life for evermore.

First Reading: Acts 4:32-35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Second Reading: 1 John 1 - 2:2

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for

our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Gospel: John 20:19-31

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." ²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." ²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." ³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

One of the "gifts" of Covid-time is that one can travel over the whole world and at any hour of the day or night and take in an online worship service.

Also, not having worship at the church at the moment has let us to develop a new Sunday morning routine. After breakfast – sometimes something special like pancakes or waffles, we gather on the couch and watch our Christ Lutheran service on television. Then, Wally and Manon head off to

do something else, and I usually watch one or two more worship services that catch my interest.

On Maundy Thursday, I took in the service from Faith Lutheran in Rutland, led by Pastor Brian Krushel, and so decided to “join them” again for Easter Sunday morning. It was quite a nice service, and I particularly appreciated Pastor Brian’s sermon.

He, too focussed on Mark’s Resurrection account, and the fear and confusion of the women when they found the tomb empty and the young man there telling them that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, and they should follow him to Galilee.

The women did not do that, as the text tells us:

⁸So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Pastor Brian concluded his sermon with the following words:

“...this Gospel embraces mystery, and in so doing, gives us permission to do the same....As much as our world loves explanations that convince us beyond the shadow of a doubt, there is something to be said for embracing mysterySome things are grasped with the heart and the soul and not the mind. Some things need to be believed to be seen.... Faith is trust, trust that God will do what God has promised and resurrection is the

outcome of that faith...in faith we embrace mystery, and the one who is the deepest mystery, the God who has raised Jesus from the dead, the one who will one day raise us from the dead... embraces us, and I'm okay with that. Happy Easter, Alleluia!

It struck me how his words provide the perfect segue or intro to this Sunday, Easter 2, as the Easter story continues.

It is evening, on the same first day of the week with its dramatic events of the morning and the news that Jesus had risen from the dead. Wondering, bewildered, unsure, anxious, hopeful, the disciples have locked themselves in the safety of the upper room, no doubt trying to figure out what to do next.

Suddenly, Jesus appears in their midst, with the words: "Peace be with you.", followed by showing them the wounds in his hands and his side, and then again, "Peace be with you.", followed by "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ..., "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

And then he is gone again. The disciples are thrilled and overjoyed, but no doubt also overwhelmed with what it all means.

For whatever reason, Thomas is not there, so you can imagine the joy and excitement as they share the news with him when he returns.

Thomas! Thomas! You won't believe it – Jesus – he was here! We saw him, he showed us his wounds, he is risen, just as he said...!

Thomas doesn't believe it, or perhaps he is more disappointed and angry that he wasn't there, and he fires back:

“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

Show me...prove it to me....

Well, a week later, his wish is granted. Jesus appears again, and again with the words, “Peace be with you.”, and to Thomas directly:

“Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

“My Lord and my God!” “, is Thomas' immediate response, awe and wonder in his voice, perhaps he even fell to his knees...but his response goes further than that. He not only shares his fellow disciples wonder and joy, he also sees that this Jesus is more than their teacher and friend,

returned from the dead, this Jesus is truly the Son of God, “true God from true God” as would be written generations later, and so in the seeing of Jesus, Thomas believed, and in that believing, Thomas also “saw” Jesus in a deeper light than the others.

Jesus has an immediate response for Thomas – and for us, looking on all these centuries later - *“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”*

Each one of us comes to faith in our own way. Some learn it in childhood in a family routine of church on Sunday, Sunday school, perhaps prayer and bible reading at home, Confirmation later on and stay with it their whole life long...the baptized babies that do not leave....

Others might begin that way, but for whatever reason drift away, and then eventually find their way back – we are reminded of the words from the much-loved hymn, “Morning Cry” – *“In a blaze of light you wandered off find where demons dwell...when you heard the wonder of the word, I was there to cheer you on....”*

And then there might be those who did not grow up in a faith tradition, but somehow through a friend, a life experience, happenstance, an inner yearning came to faith in a more circuitous route.

Our God understands that there are many ways that point to the divine, and allows each of us our doubt or our faith – as Pastor Brian said – this deepest mystery of all embraces us, loves us, and leads us forward.

And therein lies the mystery of our faith, for faith is not only an individual action, faith is the dynamic held by the community. We, the baptized people of God carry that faith – for ourselves, for one another, and for a world that may or may not believe. The faith is carried, nurtured, and strengthened and then carried forward in service and love toward others.

And so, in those times when our faith might falter, we are reminded to turn to the community, the keepers of the faith, for it is their faith and the hands of God that will carry us until we find our feet again.

Our Gospel text for today concludes with John's words:

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to

believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Seeing is believing...believing is seeing.

May our faith be renewed over and over with these stories and these holy writings, so that we not only believe in the risen Christ, but that we see him daily in all of humanity, love him and serve him...

Christ *is* risen, Alleluia!

Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia! Alleluia!

Amen.